



NEWS RELEASE

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

November 28, 1995

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**STUDY SHOWS AMERICANS SUPPORT HUNTING
BUT CONCERNED ABOUT UNETHICAL, UNSAFE HUNTERS**

A large majority of the American public approves of hunting and believes it should continue to be legal, but most Americans also believe many hunters engage in unethical or unsafe practices, according to a comprehensive study sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The 3-year study conducted by Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, Virginia, showed that nearly 75 percent of Americans approved of hunting. Of these, 40 percent strongly approved and 33 percent moderately approved. Meanwhile 11 percent strongly disapproved of hunting and 11 percent moderately disapproved. Eighty-one percent of Americans believe hunting should remain legal while 16 percent said it should be illegal, the study showed.

"Hunting is a cherished part of our national heritage, and hunters themselves are important contributors to wildlife conservation," said Service Director Mollie H. Beattie. "This study affirms that American people understand this and support regulated hunting as an acceptable and legal wildlife-related activity even if they do not choose to hunt themselves.

"However, at the same time, the study should alert the hunting community to the public's concern over unethical or unsafe hunting practices."

The study showed 62 percent of Americans believe "a lot" of hunters violate hunting laws or practice unsafe behavior while hunting. Mixing alcohol and hunting was considered the most prevalent problem. Fifty percent of Americans believe "a lot" or a "moderate number" of hunters drink while in the field. Even among hunters, nearly half believed a large percentage of their fellow hunters violate hunting laws or practice unsafe behavior while hunting.

The study, which focused on both hunting and fishing, included a series of focus groups, a nationwide telephone survey, and an analysis of data collected as part of the Service's 1991 Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. The study underscored the importance of the social aspects of hunting and fishing.

"One of the conclusions of the study is that hunting and fishing are largely family-oriented activities," said Mark Damian Duda, executive director of Responsive Management. "People are initiated into hunting

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and fishing through the family, they derive most of their satisfaction from participating with family members, and they often stop hunting and fishing when there are no family or friends to share the experience with."

Among the other findings were:

- o The number of hunters as a percentage of the U.S. population fell slightly from 10.2 percent in 1980 to 9.3 percent in 1990. Meanwhile, the number of anglers as a percentage of the population climbed from 26 percent in 1980 to 27.4 percent in 1990.
- o The number of men who hunted fell from 19.5 percent of the male population to 16.4 percent from 1980 to 1990 while the percentage of women who hunted rose from 1.3 percent to 2.7 percent. The study attributed the decline in hunting among men to increasing urbanization and an overall aging of the male population. There are no clear demographic reasons for the increase among women hunters but it may be attributable to women's changing roles in society.
- o The percentage of men who fished remained stable from 1980 to 1990 at just over 37 percent; the percentage of women who fished rose sharply from 15 percent to 17.7 percent, an 18-percent increase. Again the study found no correlation between the increase in women's participation and demographic factors.
- o While 96 percent of Americans believe fishing should remain legal, 40 percent believe a lot of anglers violate fishing laws. The major suspected offenses are fishing over the creel limit and keeping undersized fish.
- o Eighty-four percent of hunters were "satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their hunting experience in the past 2 years.
- o Twenty-five percent of hunters hunt primarily for the meat, 12 percent to be with friends and family, 43 percent for sport and recreation, and 21 percent to be close to nature.
- o Thirteen percent of anglers fish primarily for food, 25 percent to be with family and friends, 18 percent for sport, 33 percent for relaxation, 7 percent to be close to nature, and 3 percent to catch large fish.

The study was made possible by a grant from the Fish and Wildlife Service to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Copies of the final report will be available to the public in late December through the Service's publications unit at 703-358-1711. The news media may contact the Public Affairs office at 202-208-5634 or the Federal Aid office at 703-358-2156.